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Lila Ist Der Letzte Versuch

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Abstract

She squats in a corner and hums grinding glass between her palms. "The panes in my windows shattered, I must replace them before winter."

Additional Keywords

Poetry; Lila Ist Der Letzte Versuch; Lala Heine-Koene

LILA IST DER LETZTE VERSUCH *

by lala heine-koene

She squats in a corner and hums
grinding glass between her palms.
"The panes in my windows shattered,
I must replace them before winter:"
*these will be for the east wing,
these for the west
the left-over splinters will do for the north;
I shan't worry about the south.
Blue is the colour of my ancestors,
the red my marriage lot;
the trees and grass outside will stain some green,
the purple I shan't attempt.*
"Do not disturb me," she calls to the bats,
"you mustn't touch my hair,
I pinned it tightly
around my skull
after the wedding night.
Mind the gargoyle's marble eye
that opens the passage behind
the fireplace. I do not want strangers
to walk in on me."

"I am almost done," she murmurs, stretching
her tired legs, "it is time to bend
the lead to fit the stained glass in,
nail the doors shut and let the sun
paint my face gold."

"Who is this man?" she asks, a shadow
passing over her face, blinded by
the sun. "He must be a stranger,
his feet do not know what board
to step on to keep it from creaking.
My face is still pale, the sun has not
healed the flesh on my palms. I cannot
greet anyone. Bats, show the man out!"

"Last night he was fishing
in the stream encircling your gardens;
his fish jumped out of the net,
he followed it through the passage
under the house. He came to offer it
to you." "I do not partake of food
offered by strangers, he cannot

sit at my table" trying to wipe the shadow
off her face. "Bats, show the man out!"
"We cannot see the gargoyle's blind
eye, how are we to open the panel?"
the bats flying, circling her head,
"we must wait 'til nightfall."
"And I will wait," the stranger says.
She hears the board creak beside her.
"The fish needs water or it will
die, frighten the bats. I do not want
a dead fish in my house," shielding
her eyes with her raw hands.
"They are getting better," the stranger
says, turning her palms toward
the sun; "in a little while
you can help to scale the fish,
I will remove the bones," a squirming
net touching her feet.

"Your face is now the right colour,
let us prepare our meal." The man
sets out across the room to ring
the bell. "There are no servants in
the house, they disappeared with
the flaking mosaic. The bats are my only
companions, keeping the rats in check."
"They will do. Help to get the meal
on the table." He pulls the arching
fish out of the net, stuns it,
chopping its head with one clean
blow. "Bats, take the head for your
feast; the mistress and I will do
the rest." One by one she removes
the scales, putting them into a blue
china bowl. ("These will be the paillettes
for your new gown. The bones you can
use to keep your hair pinned neatly.")
Soon the fish scaled and boned
lay on the table. "Bats, start the fire
in the fireplace!" he calls.
They pick up a letter torn in half,
shred it into pieces, holding them
in their beaks under a thick chunk
of glass, still hot from the sun.

The edges curl, a flame rises,
they carry it, the smell of singed
fur trailing behind them.

The fish speared on a sabre (it used
to be her father's before he was
married) sizzles and sputters, the fat
dripping into the fire. Soon it is done.
"It must cool off before we eat;
the tip might burn your lips," he says,
removing the sabre from the cavernous
hearth. "You do not want me at your table,
we shall then eat before the fire,"
holding out to her the speared fish,
a delicious aroma rising to her nostrils,
"the bats are gone for the night."

"Take the fishbones out of your hair,
they are hard to sleep on," the man
reaches for her nape. "You mustn't
see the length of my hair, it was not
cut since I was a child!"
protecting her tightly pinned plaits.
"I will wait for the morning
when you comb your hair," he touches
her three-times-wound braided crown.
"The bats will be then back
I must give each my combed-out hair,
these are their wages. But I will
give you one hair if you leave now."
Thirty-three bones quickly removed, hair
unbraided,
pinned neatly again. The gargoyle's
marble eye pushed, a panel springs
open and he is gone, the one long
hair trailing behind him.
"Now I can go to sleep," she murmurs,
lying down beside the dying embers,
closing her eyes to the swaying hair
caught between the panel.

"The bats are back, I can hear them
come," standing by the window,
combing out the early mist from her
hair, "tonight we shall gossip
by the fire," she smiles at the sun.
"Good morrow mistress," a pair of eyes
upside-down, from above her window,
between the prongs of a rake wink at her.
"What are you doing up on my roof?"
her raised arm immobile.
"I am your new gardener. I just finished
putting a garden on your roof. It was
in great need of repairs. I am putting it
to good use. The radishes are up,
the string beans are doing fine,
trailing your dormitory windows."
"I have nothing to pay you with.
The bats claim my combed-out hair,
the rats and mice are in full supply
here to quiet their hunger. What of yours?"
"I like repairing roofs and growing things,
it's enough for the soul and heart.
What else would one want?"
"Do you see that turret on the south-wing?
I suspended there a dry gourd
from a linen rope (which I twisted
myself) and in it is my heart.
It makes a good clapper for the bell
which I pull three times a year at midnight
to commemorate anniversaries I cannot
remember."
"Mistress, I saw it through the hole
in the roof. I planted there a purple
climbing rose. Here it is to adorn your hair."

* Lila ist der letzte Versuch: Purple is the last attempt